

Public Health Notice

Risk of Exposure for West Nile Virus Increased for Northampton

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The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) has announced that there are now four cases of Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) and 14 cases of West Nile Virus (WNV) in Massachusetts. Although there have been no cases of either disease here in Northampton, the DPH has increased our risk level for exposure to West Nile Virus from moderate to high. The change in status for our community is based on the increase of confirmed WNV cases in the surrounding communities and ecological conditions associated with elevated mosquito abundance.

WNV is a disease which is usually transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected mosquito. While the majority of people who become infected the virus will have minor flu-like symptoms, people over the age of 50 are at higher risk of developing severe illness with symptoms that include; high fever, vomiting, neck stiffness, headache, and swollen lymph glands. The Northampton Board of Health Members and Merridith O'Leary, Public Health Director for the City of Northampton are urging all Northampton residents and visitors to take necessary precautions to protect themselves and their loved ones against mosquito-borne illnesses. Director O'Leary states "at this time the designation of "High" WNV risk does not trigger a recommendation that our community cancel planned outdoor evening events. It is strongly recommended that precautions are taken to reduce risk of exposure from mosquito bites. People need to continue to use insect repellent, cover up exposed skin, and limit outdoor activities at dusk and after nightfall when mosquitoes are most active."

The risk level of exposure to WNV will remain at high, until there is a deep frost. Until then the Northampton Board of Health will continue to monitor the situation, work closely with DPH and other agencies, and continue to update and educate the public.

Take precautions to protect yourself and family:

Avoid Mosquito Bites

-Be aware of peak mosquito hours. Schedule outdoor events to avoid the hours between dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.

-When you are outdoors, wear long pants, a long sleeved shirt and socks.

-Use a repellent with DEET, permethrin, picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus according to the instructions on the product label. DEET should not be used on infants under two months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% or less on older children. Also, oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under three years of age.

Mosquito Proof Your Home

-Keep mosquitoes out of your house by repairing any holes in your screens and that they fit properly.

-Be sure to remove areas of standing water around your home for example flowerpots, birdbaths, and gutters or drains.

Further information regarding Arbovirus disease and surveillance can be located at www.mass.gov/dph/wnv or by calling (617) 983-6800.